


# Islam Attito: The Story of the Extralegal Killing of a Student

**Written in Arabic: Mohamed Nagy**

**Researcher at the Academic Freedom and Student Rights Program**

**Original Arabic Version: http://afteegypt.org/?p=10308**



On Wednesday the 20th of May 2015 the Egyptian Ministry of Interior announced the killing of Islam Attito, through its official Facebook page. Islam Salah al-Din Abul-Hamd Attito, 22 years of age, was a student in his senior year at the Faculty of Engineering at Ain Shams University (ASU). The police accused Attito of taking part in the assassination of a police officer, Colonel Wael Tahoun.

In the following days, the stark differences between the official story provided by the MoI and that of eyewitnesses drew attention to Islam's death. Moreover, the official information provided by the Faculty of Engineering at ASU refuted the news published by the Ministry.

Through this report, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) tries to elucidate the truth behind the killing of Attito by tracking the official information published on the issue, in addition to relying on the testimonies of Islam's relatives, colleagues, and one of his professors, who witnessed some of the facts or were involved in it.

It is important to note that getting in touch with witnesses and convincing them to provide AFTE with testimonies was difficult, this was either because of their emotional attachment to the victim or because they were afraid of persecution if they reveal their identities.

**The Police's Story**

On Wednesday, at almost half past one in the afternoon the MoI placed emphasis on the fact that "it killed the main suspect in the assassination of the police officer Wael Tahoun" in a statement, published on Facebook. The statement pointed out that Islam opened fire on the police force during a raid on his hiding place in a deserted area in Cairo's suburbs. As a result, the police in an exchange of gunfire shot him and his automatic weaponry was seized shortly after. (*i*)

Despite the furor caused over the killing of Attito, the MoI continued to reassert its story. Major-general Abu Bakr Abdel Karim, the head of the Human Rights Sector of the Ministry of Interior, claimed that the victim was "a terrorist" on satellite TV, and he confirmed Attito's involvement in the assassination of Wael Tahoun according to the confessions of a number of suspects who were

arrested earlier. Abdel Karim denied the extrajudicial killing of Attito affirming the MoI's statement around his death. (*ii*)

In short, the MoI is simply reiterating that Atiito was a member in one of the Muslim Brotherhood's select committees accused of the assassination of Wael Tahoun, and that while security forces were trying to arrest Attito from his hiding place in New Cairo's desert, he fired upon them and security forces responded by an exchange of gunfire until Islam was shot dead.

**A Different Version of the Story**

Contrary to the MoI's statement, Islam's colleagues at the Faculty of Engineering, his relatives, and professors present a sequence of events that disproves the official story of his death.

The Faculty of Engineering at ASU issued a statement confirming Islam's attendance of the "Humanities" exam on Tuesday the 19th of May (*iii*), a day before the MoI announced his death.

Furthermore, a student who was present at the same examination room on the 19th- room 206 A- confirmed that two individuals entered the examination room, an employee from the Office of Student Affairs and a stranger. They went in at 10:40 am (20 minutes before the end of the exam) and they requested that Islam heads to the Office of Student Affairs to complete some missing paperwork. Islam exited campus directly after the exam and did not pass by the office.

In its statement (referred to above) the Faculty of Engineering's administration stated that it is a customary occurrence for the employees of the Office of Student Affairs to pass by examination rooms requesting the completion of missing data from some students. However, a number of teaching assistants at the same faculty issued a statement denying the matter and stressing on the fact that this has never happened during their work at the faculty (some of them have been working as exam invigilators for the past eight years, according to the statement). (*iv*)

Attito left campus at 11:23 am, according to surveillance cameras (as stated in the aforementioned faculty statement). Dr. Mohamed Hassan Sulieman, Professor of Humanities (the subject of the last exam Islam attended) said that he saw the footage of the university's surveillance cameras while he

was at the prosecution's investigation on campus where the investigator asked him to handover Islam's answer sheet. (*v)*

Sulieman said that Islam calmly exited campus and took a right turn, but he appeared on camera again shortly after, and was being chased by two people.

A screenshot of an online conversation between two people was published on a blog launched by students from the Faculty of Engineering. In this conversation one of the individuals claimed that they saw two policemen arbitrarily arrest Attito around campus area (the libraries area to be specific), and forced him into a "Daewoo" car. (*vi*) However, AFTE was not able to validate this testimony despite various attempts to reach the witness who refuses to reveal his identity out of fear of persecution.

"Islam was residing in his family home in Ain Shams and attended two other final exams in addition to the one preceding his arrest," said Yassin (one of Islam's relatives who refused to reveal his real name). Yassin also confirmed that the police did not try to arrest Islam from his house in the previous period, pointing out that they did not know or hear of the issuance of any arrest warrants for Islam.

"Islam's mother and I went to look for him since he was out of reach after his exam, which was unusual, we started looking for him from 8 pm until 11:30 pm. At first we headed to Al Wayly's police station because of its proximity to campus, and then to Ain Shams police station. We did not find him".

"At half past ten the next morning, his mother went to Al Wayly prosecution office and filed a report for his disappearance", "two hours later we read the news of his death in the newspapers". Yassin added regretfully.

**Forensic Medicine... and other Testimonies Suggesting Torture**

The Forensic Medicine Authority issued a preliminary report after examining Islam's body. They confirmed that the death resulted from injury by more than five fatal bullets in different parts of his

body. The report was then handed over to the East Cairo General Prosecution Office. (*vii*)

The preliminary report did not refer to any signs of torture on Islam's body; however, Yassin (Islam's relative) insists that there is clear evidence of that.

"I was present when they were washing his body before burial. There was severe redness under his armpits and on his thighs, which is evidence of torture. I also noticed injuries that are a result of being beaten with a sharp object on his forehead. On top of all that his left arm was broken, in addition to clear fractures on his left side", said Yassin.

Perhaps the final forensic report will clarify the reasons behind the marks found on Attito's body.

**Which Story to Believe?**

The previous details we worked on documenting and the testimonies we collected indicate that the story told by Attito's colleagues and relatives is more cohesive than that of the official story; the MoI's story, which raises serious doubts.

It is clear then, that Islam attended all his final exams a day before he was killed. Not only that, but Islam was also residing in his family home just like the majority of Egyptian students his age, which is what his professor Mohamed Hassan Solieman tried to corroborate through a post on his personal Facebook profile. Solieman mentioned that he reviewed Islam's answer sheet and he confirmed that he deserves a B+ on his exam; Solieman added sarcastically "it seems that Islam's hiding cave was air-conditioned and helped him focus on his studies!" (*viii*)

Therefore, according to the documented sequence of events, policemen arrested Attito arbitrarily right after he left campus, and he remained captive until the MoI announced his death the following day.

**Student Reactions**

Regardless of the validity of any of the two versions of the story, students in different universities reacted widely after the incident.

The student union at the Faculty of Engineering at ASU announced its resignation in protest; "we cannot carry on our role when our colleague is sent to the morgue after he leaves his exam… We are incapable of taking any action that would heal our rancor at the moment" (*ix*) according to the SU's statement.

The statement also demanded the faculty board to launch an immediate investigation into Attito's death, and to take legal steps to convict those responsible.

Student movements at the faculty issued a joint statement (*x*) calling on the administration to show footage from the surveillance cameras located at Gate 3. In their statement they demanded an explanation for "the negligence of campus security in doing their job by allowing unidentified personnel on campus", the statement also wondered about "the extent of the involvement of the employee at the Office of Student Affairs (previously mentioned) with the state security apparatus". (*xi*)

The student movements issued another statement calling on all faculty members and students in support of their position on the incident to gather in front of the "Credit" building the following day, then to head to the administration to present their demands, while stressing on the fact that all of this will not interrupt student exams. (*xii*)

"The State is Terrorizing the Students" was the title of their third statement, issued the following day declaring the suspension of all their escalation plans "in the interest of the students' personal safety". The student movements accused the faculty administration of its complicity with police forces in order to "terrorize" the students. "Central Security Forces surrounded campus with the knowledge of the administration", according to the statement. (*xiii)*

A day before Islam Attito's arrest, AFTE published a report on all 20 students killed on or around campus by police forces or campus security in the past two academic years; seven of them were in Cairo University, another seven were killed on Al Azhar University's campus in Cairo, one in Al Azhar Assiut, three in Alexandria University, and two in Ain Shams University. (*xiv)*

This tragic number of students killed inside their university campuses whether because they were participating in student activities, or were in the vicinity of one, is enough reason for the state to conduct serious and impartial investigations into these cases. However, up until now, no clear conclusion came out of any of the investigations. Therefore, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression is providing a commentary on such unfortunate incidents, and it is important for the Egyptian authorities to consider what is mentioned below if they are serious about stabilizing the catastrophic situation in Egyptian universities and protecting student lives.

**Commentary**

"Governments shall prohibit by law all extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions and shall ensure that any such executions are recognized as offences under their criminal laws, and are punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account the seriousness of such offences. Exceptional circumstances including a state of war or threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency may not be invoked as a justification of such executions. Such executions shall not be carried out under any circumstances including, but not limited to, situations of internal armed conflict, excessive or illegal use of force by a public official or other person acting in an official capacity or by a person acting at the instigation, or with the consent or acquiescence of such person, and situations in which deaths occur in custody. This prohibition shall prevail over decrees issued by governmental authority".

Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. Endorsed by the UN General Assembly on December 15th 1989

We are presented with a clear case of extra-legal killing, and perhaps torture before killing. In such cases the United Nations calls for "a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death in the above circumstances. Governments

shall maintain investigative offices and procedures to undertake such inquiries. The purpose of the investigation shall be to determine the cause, manner and time of death, the person responsible, and any pattern or practice which may have brought about that death. It shall include an adequate autopsy, collection and analysis of all physical and documentary evidence and statements from witnesses." in accordance with the principles, mentioned above.

AFTE fears the recurrence of such an unfortunate incident, especially since cases of abduction and enforced disappearances- of students or other political activists- have been on the rise recently.

The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression believes that the only way to avoid recurrence is to start fair, impartial, and transparent investigations to reveal Attito's cause of death, and to hold accountable those who participated in killing him. The Egyptian authorities should take such investigations seriously and should provide suitable conditions for investigators to move forward with the case at hand.

Additionally, concerned authorities should provide full protection for the witnesses and the relatives of the victim in order for them to testify without threat or intimidation or any influence over the content of their testimonies by any of the parties involved in the incident. The provision of witness protection is one of the main pillars of a just and fair investigation process.

On the other hand, the Faculty of Engineering's administration should open an internal investigation to verify the accusations against campus security and the involvement of the employee from the Office of Student Affairs with the state's security apparatus, and hold whoever is responsible accountable to ensure the safety of the academic community.

---

## References


i Facebook, Ministry of Interior Official Page, the Ministry's statement on Islam Attito's death, May 20, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1JbKqK9

ii Masr Al Arabia, Video… "MoI, Islam Attito is a Terrorist and We did not Kill him", May 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/1K48Nsv

iii Ain Shams University, "An Important Statement from the Faculty of Engineering Concerning the Death of a Student", May 21, 2015, http://bit.ly/1LWOOKF

iv Facebook, a statement issued by the teaching assistants at the Faculty of Engineering at ASU, http://bit.ly/1FlGkYG

v "Al Araby Al Gadid" Satellite TV, Mohamed Hassan Solieman, Professor at Ain Shams University, May 25, 2015, http://bit.ly/1I1jqws (Minute 9:00)

vi A blog dedicated to documenting Islam's death, http://bit.ly/1ETEhKO, the electronic version of the testimony, http://bit.ly/1Q4GDCu

vii Al Watan News, "Forensic Medicine: Five Bullets Penetrated Attito's Body", May 26, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Fpne3V

viii Facebook, Dr. Mohamed Hassan Solieman's personal profile, http://on.fb.me/1KK3kIA

ix Facebook, the official page for ASU SU, "A Statement on Attito's Killing", May 20, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1MikRFL

x Al Midan movement, Masr Al Qaweya movement, 6 April student movement, 6 April Democratic Front student movement, Revolutionary Socialists student movement, Students against the Coup movement, all signed the statement

xi Facebook, Masr Al Qaweya student movement at ASU official page, "A Statement from the Student Movement at the Faculty of Engineering at Ain Shams University", May 22, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1JoeIru

xii Facebook, Masr Al Qaweya student movement at ASU official page, "Second Statement from the Student Movement at the Faculty of Engineering at Ain Shams University", May 22, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1M2Hqxt

xiii The student movement's third joint statement on Attito's killing, http://bit.ly/1dKlkFl

xiv The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, "The First of them is Abdul Ghani, and the Last one is Anas… AFTE Publishes a Report on Students Killed in the Past Two Academic Years", May 18, 2015, http://bit.ly/1EV3MLM